



## Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND  
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARK LOWCOCK****Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in South Sudan***New York, 15 December 2020**As delivered*

Thank you very much Mr. President,

Back in September, if you recall, I briefed the Council on worsening food insecurity in South Sudan. And one day after that, with David Beasley and Qu Dongyu, I warned you of multiple famines looming.

Since then, I've also provided you with a detailed description of what a famine does to a human being's body and mind, in a briefing I gave you on Yemen.

Unfortunately, people in parts of South Sudan, as David [SGSR David Shearer] has alluded to, are on the brink of famine today.

The global Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) Real-Time Quality Review just completed identified five counties in Jonglei, Warrap, and Northern Bahr el Ghazal states – Akobo, Aweil South, Tonj East, Tonj North and Tonj South- where between five to ten percent of the population is living in IPC Phase 5, meaning they face “catastrophe” levels of food insecurity. In some places, the number of people in IPC phase 5 is going to grow between now and July 2021.

And though this analysis at the country level is still being finalized, the IPC Review Committee presented a ‘famine likely’ situation also in Western Pibor County last week.

So it would be fair to say that our fears from September have now materialized in these six counties. How did we get here?

Millions of South Sudanese people have been pushed to a breaking point. Violence, flooding, COVID-19, and a deteriorating economy are making an already bad humanitarian crisis much worse, especially in the six counties I've just mentioned.

Violence continues to be one of the main drivers of severe food insecurity in South Sudan. And correspondingly we see the highest levels of acute food insecurity in the places most affected by violence.

In the first half of the year, four successive waves of major violence in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area displaced nearly 160,000 people. In Warrap State, where three of the counties with IPC phase 5 classification are located, nearly 100,000 people were displaced due to violence between May and June.

Two consecutive years of intense flooding have then made the situation worse. More than half a million people in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area and close to 400,000 people in Warrap State have been affected by the compounded effects of flooding and fighting.

And on top of that, COVID-19 with its socioeconomic impact has made life even harder. South Sudan's economy continues to contract, partly as a result of falling oil prices. Essential commodity and food prices are increasing in the face of rapidly depreciating exchange rate and subsequent inflation.

Overall, this year 7.5 million people in South Sudan – which lets remember is more than 60 per cent of the entire country – need humanitarian assistance. And this number is likely to increase once the IPC results are finalized. Well over a million children under the age of five are forecasted to be malnourished – that's the highest number in four years. Families facing the most severe food security problems have already exhausted their emergency coping strategies and so they rely on food aid if they are going to survive.

Under such extreme conditions, people are left with little choice but to adopt harmful coping mechanisms, especially women and girls. Girls are more likely to be forced into early marriage or are more likely to drop out of school and in many cases as we know when girls drop out of school they will never return.

What are humanitarian partners doing to try to meet this growing need, to stave off famine?

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and South Sudan Humanitarian Fund continue to plan an important role. I provided \$39 million from CERF to South Sudan so far this year, a substantial proportion to address rising food insecurity. And that includes the \$7 million allocation I made the other day, as part of the overall special CERF's allocation for dealing globally with food insecurity.

Humanitarian agencies and NGOs in South Sudan are scaling up a response across sectors in all of the most affected six counties. Food agencies working on food security were able to distribute emergency food to nearly 78,000 people in Pibor in November. WFP has expanded its air fleet, so that we can get food, nutrition and health services delivered more quickly in a challenging logistical and security environment.

But we need to do more. We need more funding to ensure food and livelihoods, health services, and other life-saving programmes are supported in the six counties I've talked about, but also across the entire country. The South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020 is the largest ever for South Sudan, at nearly \$2 billion dollars. It is currently only two-thirds funded as we approach the end of the year.

We expect needs to be even higher next year. Early funding would help a lot and to get ahead of needs which as David alluded to we can expect to see increase as a result of the dry season in early 2021.

I want to pay special credit to our humanitarian colleagues in South Sudan, led ably and with a great dedication by David's deputy Alain Noudéhou. Most humanitarian workers in South Sudan are themselves South Sudanese. The humanitarian response in country has kept millions of people from sliding into famine. Aid agencies have assisted more than six million people across the country this year. UNICEF, WFP and the agencies, especially NGOs they work with, they have already treated nearly 600,000 children affected by acute malnutrition, and 94 per of those children I am pleased to tell have recovered.

This shows how effective support can be, if people get the help they need on time, and aid workers are able to do their job.

But, again as David alluded to, it is getting harder for aid workers to deliver assistance in South Sudan, especially in those parts of the country facing the most severe food insecurity.

Access in Greater Pibor Administrative Area has been particularly difficult this year. Health clinics and food warehouses have been looted on at least 20 occasions in Jonglei and Pibor. Some 144 aid workers had to be relocated this year because of threats to their security.

And most abhorrently, as David said, nine aid workers have been killed this year in South Sudan – eight of them in Jonglei and Pibor. Two more aid workers were killed in the country since I last briefed you in September.

This is unacceptable.

All aid workers – from local and international NGOs, the Red Cross, and UN agencies- who continue to stay and deliver in an extremely challenging environment must be protected.

Let me conclude, Mr. President, by reiterating three things that need to happen now to prevent the famine problem worsening.

First and foremost, all actors with any influence must work to de-escalate the violence. Humanitarian partners are worried that a spike in violence in early 2021 is likely, as the dry season starts, because we have seen the spike in violence in other years and we worry particularly about people. That could be catastrophic and would push many more people to the brink. We also need to see efforts continue to find political solutions obviously to end violence that cause famine trend.

Secondly, humanitarian agencies need more support frankly from the Government of South Sudan for safe and unhindered access to reach people who desperately need help.

And thirdly, humanitarian agencies, if they to scale up assistance as necessary, need to receive all resources particularly to deal with severe food insecurity. So, we need additional resources for the Humanitarian Response Plan. And I urge donors again to please give generously and also quickly.

Thank you very much indeed Mr. President.